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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 000714

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/S, ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2018  
TAGS: PREL PINR SADC SOCI ETRD ZI BC SF  
SUBJECT: TSVANGIRAI VISITS GABORONE AS FIRST STOP AFTER  
SADC SUMMIT

REF: GABORONE 705

Classified By: ACTING POLE CHIEF DAVID YOUNG; REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Zimbabwe MDC opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai visited Gaborone immediately after the SADC Summit, reportedly meeting with President Khama who had boycotted the weekend's Johannesburg Summit in protest over the Zimbabwe political impasse. The GOB has been cagey about the visit, first spinning it as a regional tour, but Tsvangirai was definitely here. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Botswana print and radio media has reported the August 18-19 visit of Morgan Tsvangirai to Gaborone, straight from the SADC Summit in South Africa, which was boycotted by Botswana President Ian Khama because the GOB does not recognize the results of the June 27 election run-off in Zimbabwe. Reports noted that Botswana has been accommodating to Tsvangirai and offered him temporary refuge at the height of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. An MFA spokesperson was quoted in the media as characterizing Tsvangirai's visit as part of a regional tour to brief regional leaders on progress made on the power-sharing deal mediations. Also according to the press, the GOB denied reports that Botswana is considering plans to grant Tsvangirai a diplomatic passport. The MFA spokesperson said Botswana cannot give a foreign national a passport.

¶3. (C) Embassy contacts have confirmed that Tsvangirai spent the night of August 18 in Gaborone and met with the Botswana President and the Foreign Minister. The Charge rode by the GOB's usually dark official guest house in Gaborone (where Tsvangirai has stayed before) around 1930 on August 18, and lights were on and GOB vehicles present. The same scene was much more pronounced around 0930 on August 19, with more official cars and apparent security or staff standing around outside. Our contacts believe Tsvangirai's mission here was to raise funds, meet people otherwise difficult to meet in South Africa, and consolidate his position for power-sharing talks. Our contacts suggest the regional tour description may have been an artificial spin, and Tsvangirai may have departed back to South Africa on August 19 (at least according to what we have been told thus far). The MFA Americas Director confirmed Tsvangirai's visit to Acting P/E Chief, but was unable or unwilling to provide any other information.

¶4. (C) Comment: The SADC Heads of State Summit heralded the launch of the regional Free Trade Area, aimed to usher in a new level of regional integration, with reportedly no import tariffs on 85 percent of all traded goods in the twelve country region. The summit's integration bash was distracted by President Khama's principled boycott and continuing difficult Zimbabwe power-sharing negotiations on the margins. It is not clear yet what Tsvangirai may have accomplished by his quick trip to Gaborone, other than needed solidarity from a close-by friend, but Botswana appears to have amplified its role as Tsvangirai's key supporter. End Comment.

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